

Bass Fishing in Idaho

For a Rocky Mountain state most famous for its trout fishing, Idaho has some remarkably good bass fishing on scenic and relatively uncrowded waters. Both largemouth and smallmouth bass can be found from the low elevation lakes in Idaho's Panhandle to the rivers, lakes and reservoirs in southern and southeast Idaho. Smallmouth bass tend to be found along the rocky shorelines of larger lakes and low elevation rivers, while largemouth bass prefer the warmer water of smaller lakes and reservoirs or the shallow bays of large lakes. Both species are popular with anglers because they are aggressive predators that will strike a variety of baits and lures.

A relatively short growing season means Idaho's smallmouth and largemouth bass grow slower than bass in the southern states. It can take four or five years to grow a 12-inch fish and close to ten years to grow a trophy. Most of Idaho is managed with a 12-inch minimum length for bass, while some lakes are managed with special seasons or size limits. Restrictive harvest rules don't guarantee you'll catch a giant, but you will probably get to catch (and mostly release) more fish and bigger fish than in waters with more liberal rules. In some northern Idaho waters, smallmouth bass harvest rules are different from largemouth bass rules, so it's important to know the difference between species. As always, check the fishing rules before you go.



Idaho's more popular smallmouth bass waters include Hayden Lake in the Panhandle Region; Dworshak Reservoir in the Clearwater Region;



Evin Oneale, IDFG

Smallmouth bass are found in a number of Idaho rivers and reservoirs

Oxbow, Brownlee, and C.J. Strike reservoirs in the Southwest Region; Milner and Minidoka reservoirs in the Magic Valley Region; and American Falls Reservoir in the Southeast Region.

Largemouth bass prefer warmer water and are not as widespread. Explore the chain lakes along the Coeur d'Alene River in the Panhandle Region, Lake Lowell and Crane Falls Lake in the Southwest Region, and most small ponds and reservoirs in southern and southeast Idaho.

Fishing tackle for bass should include light to medium action rods with 6 to 10 pound test line. Plastic tube jigs or crankbaits can be effective for smallmouth, while largemouth will strike a variety of soft plastic worms and jigs, spinner baits and minnow-imitation lures. When fishing for bass, focus on shallower shoreline areas, off points and around rocks, brush or other cover.